

Pillars and Columns



Masonic Booklet, No. 4

20
50

Masonic Booklet No. 4

Pillars and Columns

THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

AMERICAN BRANCH

KROTONA

HOLLYWOOD: LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

1919

Introductory.

The unplumbed depths of Masonic Symbolism can ever be searched with the certainty of bringing to light spiritual treasures containing valuable lessons for the thoughtful student of the Craft. An example of this is the subject under consideration, namely, the Three Invisible Pillars, Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty or Harmony, the emblematical supports upon which is erected the Building not made with hands, where never the sound of a tool is heard; and the various Columns, with the symbolism appropriate to their use and purpose in the Lodge.

THE INVISIBLE PILLARS

Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty.

The symbolism of the Three PILLARS is found in many cults, though slightly differing from the Masonic. Dr. Oliver illustrates this fact*: "In the British and other mysteries these three Pillars represented the great emblematical Triad of Deity, as with us they refer to the three principal officers of the Lodge. We shall find however that the symbolic meaning was the same in both. It is a fact that in Britain the Adytum or Lodge was actually supported by three stones or pillars, which were supposed to convey a regenerating purity to the aspirant, after having endured the ceremony of Initiation in all its accustomed formalities. The delivery from between those was termed a new birth. The corresponding Pillars of the Hindu Mythology were also known by the names of Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty, and placed in

*"Signs and Symbols," by Geo. Oliver, D. D.

the east, west, and south, crowned with three human heads. They jointly referred to the Creator who was said to have planned the Great Work by His Infinite Wisdom, executed it by His strength, and to have adorned it with all its Beauty and usefulness for the benefit of man. These united powers were not overlooked in the mysteries, for we find them represented in the solemn ceremony of initiation by the three presiding Brahmins or Hierophants. The chief Brahmin, * * * the representative of Brahma was seated in the east, that of Vishnu in the west, and that of Siva in the south. * * *

The Persians, who termed their emblematical Mithratic Cave or Lodge the Empyrean, feigned it to be supported by three Intelligences, Ormisda, Mithra, and Mithras, who were usually denominated, from certain characteristics they were supposed to possess, Eternity, Fecundity, and Authority. Similar to this were the forms of the Egyptian Deity designated by the attributes of Wisdom, Power, and Goodness; and the Sovereign Good, Intellect, and Energy of the Platonists."

The adoption in Masonry of the three pillars dates back to the Operative Masons of the Middle Ages, according to Stieglitz,* and Mackey states† that “this symbol is not found among those of the Gnostics, and was not familiar to the Rosicrucians, and therefore,—out of the three sources of our symbolism,—Gnosticism, Rosicrucianism, and Operative Masonry—it is most probable that it has been derived from the last.”

The invisible supports, Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty or Harmony, are represented in the visible Lodge by the R. W. M., S. W., and J. W., in the East, West, and South, thus preserving the triangle, the Masonic symbol of God.

Both the French and German Masons maintain these three Pillars in their rituals, and Bazot says:‡ “The three great Pillars sustain the Lodge. The first, the emblem of Wisdom, is represented by the Master, who sits in the east, whence light and his commands emanate. The second, the em-

*Stieglitz, “On the old German Architecture.”

†Mackey, “Encyclopædia,” p. 769.

‡Bazot’s “Manual,” p. 225.

blem of strength, is represented by the S. W. who sits in the west. * * * The third and last pillar is the emblem of beauty; it is represented by the J. W., who sits in the south."

The Pillars of the Lodge.

One of our great Masons, Albert Pike, to whom we owe much esoteric interpretation of our symbolism, voices the same ideas:* "The lodge is said to be supported by three great columns, Wisdom, Force or Strength, and Beauty, represented by the Master, Senior Warden, and the Junior Warden, and these are said to be the columns that support the lodge because Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty are the perfections of everything, and nothing can endure without them. 'Because,' the American Rite says, 'it is necessary that there should be Wisdom to conceive, Strength to support, and Beauty to adorn all great and important undertakings.'" "The laws of God are not obligatory on us because they are the enactments of His power, or the expression of His will;

*Albert Pike, "Morals and Dogma," pp. 7 and 8.

but because they express His infinite Wisdom. They are not right because they are His laws, but His laws because they are right. From the equilibrium of infinite wisdom and infinite force results perfect harmony, in physics and in the moral universe. Wisdom, Power, Harmony constitute one Masonic triad. * * * As to the ordinary and commonplace explanation it may be added, that the wisdom of the architect is displayed in combining, as only a skilful architect can do, and as God has done everywhere * * strength with grace, beauty, symmetry, proportion, lightness, ornamentation."

The same writer, when speaking of the Tetractys of Pythagoras says: "To us (i.e. Masons) its three sides represent the three principal attributes of the Deity, which created and now, as ever, support, uphold and guide the Universe in its eternal movement; the three supports of the Masonic Temple, itself an emblem of the universe; Wisdom, or the infinite Divine Intelligence; Strength, or Power, the infinite Divine Will; and Beauty, or the infinite Divine Harmony, the Eternal Law

by virtue of which the infinite myriads of suns and worlds flash ever onward in their ceaseless revolutions, without clash or conflict, in the infinite Space, and change and movement are the Law of all created existences.*

Architecture Symbolized.

To the distinguished Scotch Mason, William Preston, we are indebted for the revival of the symbolism connecting these three Pillars with the three great ancient Orders of Architecture, the Ionic, the Doric, and the Corinthian. To this, concise reference is made in Mackey's Lexicon of Freemasonry, (pp. 521, 458, and 60):

Wisdom.

One of the three principal supports of Masonry. It is represented by the Ionic column, and the W. M., because the Ionic column wisely combines the strength without the massiveness of the Doric; with the grace without the exuberance of ornament of the Corinthian; and because it is the duty of the W. M. to superintend, instruct, and enlighten the craft by his superior

*Albert Pike, "Morals and Dogma," p. 826.

wisdom. Solomon, king of Israe^l, is also considered as the column of wisdom that supported the temple.

Strength.

One of the three principal supports of Masonry. It is represented by the Doric column and the S. W.; because the Doric is the strongest and most massive of the Orders, and because it is the duty of the S. W. by an attentive superintendence of the craft, to aid the W. M. in the performance of his duties, and to strengthen and support his authority. Hiram, king of Tyre, is considered as the representative of the column of strength which supported the Temple.

Beauty.

One of the three principal supports of Masonry. It is represented by the Corinthian column and the J. W.; because the Corinthian is the most beautiful and highly finished of the Orders, and because the situation of the J. W. in the south enables him the better to observe that bright luminary which, at the meridian height, is the beauty and glory of the day. Hiram Abif is

considered as the representative of the column of beauty which supported the temple.

Cosmology and the Pillars.

We conclude this part of our subject by quoting Dr. Oliver's words which express the grandeur of the symbology of the three Pillars;* "The emblematical foundation of a Mason's Lodge is Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty. These three noble Pillars give it a stability which no exertion of art or ingenuity can subvert, no force can overthrow. They were thus named in allusion to the perfection with which our system has been endowed by the Almighty Architect, because without Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support, and Beauty to adorn, no structure can be perfect. And this is illustrated by a reference to the most splendid and awful images which can be presented to the human mind. The Universe is the temple of the Deity Whom we serve; Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty are about His throne as Pillars of His work, for His Wisdom is infinite, His Strength is omnipotent,

*Geo. Oliver, D.D., "Signs and Symbols," p. 87.

and His Beauty shines forth through all His creation in symmetry and order. He hath stretched forth the heavens as a canopy, the earth He hath planted as His footstool; He hath crowned this superb Temple with stars as with a diadem, and in His hand He extendeth the power and the glory; the sun and the moon are the messengers of His will, and all His laws are concord. This universal harmony of nature and nature's works, emblematical of the peace and unity which subsist in a Mason's Lodge, is produced from the union of those sublime qualities by which our fabric is supported: Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty."

THE TWO COLUMNS.

Ancient Prototypes.

The two columns, BOAZ and JACHIN, have a long line of ancestry trailing off into the night of time, for were not the first pillars used by the primitive inhabitants of the earth just the trunks of trees?

The Obelisk.

The more immediate ancestor of the columns was the Obelisk, the ancient Egyptian word for which meant 'stability.' They were placed on pedestals before the gateways of the principal temples of Egypt, one on each side of the door. They were also used as monuments to the gods and the dead, and for recording the deeds and reigns of the Pharaohs."

Pillars in the Old Testament.

"This custom," says the above-quoted author, "was also in use among the descendants of Seth and Shem, who erected Pillars to the honor of the

true God, the creator and preserver of all things. Enoch erected two pillars in order to transmit his knowledge to posterity by inscriptions engraven on such materials as were calculated to resist the element by which the world was to be destroyed. The pillar of Jacob was constructed to commemorate his most extraordinary vision and covenant with God."* Other characters mentioned in the Bible as erecting pillars of commemoration were Joshua, Samuel, Absalom, and, more especially interesting to the mason, Solomon, King of Israel.

*Pillars Recording Divine Teachings—
Hermes and Moses.*

With regard to the pillars set up by Enoch, the "Secret Doctrine" says: "The story told about Enoch by Josephus, namely that he had concealed his precious Rolls or Books under the pillars of Mercury or Seth, is the same as that told by Hermes, the Father of Wisdom, who concealed his Books of Wisdom under a pillar, and then, discovering the two pillars of stone, founded the science written thereon."

*Geo. Oliver, D.D., "Signs and Symbols," p. 88.

Josephus "tells us that the pillars were built by Seth,—and so they may have been—but not the Seth of biblical tradition, . . . but by those called 'Sons of the Serpent-God', or 'Sons of the Dragon', the name under which the Hierophants of Egypt and Babylon were known before the Deluge. . . . What Josephus tells us therefore must be true allegorically. According to his version the pillars were entirely covered with hieroglyphics, which, after their discovery, were copied and reproduced in the most secret corners of the inner temples of Egypt, and thus became the source of its wisdom and exceptional learning." And: "These two pillars, however, are the prototype of the two 'tables of stone' hewn by Moses at the command of the Lord." Again, further on, come the words: "Hence, also, the Egyptian pillars, the tablets, and even the 'white oriental porphyry stone' of the Masonic Legend—which Enoch, fearing that the real and precious secrets would be lost, concealed before the Deluge in the bowels of the earth—were simply the more or less symbolical and allegorical copies

from the primitive Records".* In another place in the Secret Doctrine we find the following: These two pillars symbolize the two opposite poles,—

Jakin and Boaz
 Christ and Satan
 Good and Evil
 Spirit and Matter
 Male and female.*

Astronomic and Ritual Purposes.

An eminent modern writer on Freemasonry, Frank G. Higgins, gives further interesting details on the subject of the two columns. He says: "Among all primitive peoples a pillar erected in the center of a convenient open space served as a gnomon through which the daily, monthly, and annual aspects of the sun might be taken account of. The interpretation of the shadows cast by the pillar developed into quite a science, and was always the principal occupation of the priestly caste, who learned thereby to predict the approach and departure of the sea-

*H. P. Blavatsky, "The Secret Doctrine," Vol. II, p. 558.

**Ibid., p. 542.

sons correctly, thus making their wisdom indispensable to the pastoral and agricultural peoples whom they served. On the day of the summer solstice at noon, when the sun stood vertically overhead, the Peruvians said that their god 'sat on his pillar.'

"As experiment succeeded experiment, perhaps over many centuries, it was discovered that a far greater range of solar phenomena could be registered through comparison of two of these pillars, placed at some distance apart. . . . Many ancient temple courts were paved with a pattern of alternate white and colored tiles, like a chessboard, over spaces carefully measured so as to extend 'one-third longer from west to east than from north to south.' The two pillars or obelisks were placed at the north-east and south-east of this paved work, so that when the sun rose on the morning of the summer solstice, it rose apparently in the northeast corner of the universe (which for other reasons was also considered as an oblong, 3x4 in dimensions) and the shadow of the corresponding pillar cut the court diagonally, thus describing

the hypotenuse of the Pythagorean triangle (3-4-5). . . . The eventual location of these twin pillars in the west arose from several causes. By the time the astronomical lore of the Chaldeans was ready to migrate to western Europe under the name of Druidism (the Druid priests were still called Culdees in Ireland), it had been ascertained that the axis of the earth always maintained a semi-erect position during its migration round the sun, and the ecliptic had been divided into the 12 equal parts or signs, corresponding to our months, that still obtain. This was symbolized everywhere by circles of 12 erect stones, with a fire altar in the center to symbolize the sun.

“The pillars of the west have ever marked the scene of the nightly tragedy of the loss of light, and the annual one of the death of nature. They are termed the Pillars of Hercules, because of the scene of the descent into Hades which constituted the last of the 12 “labors” of this ancient year-god. . . . The two promontories, Gibraltar and Ceuta, marking the westernmost extension of Europe, were

called the Pillars of Hercules by the Phoenecian sailors.”*

Yet another mason refers to the antiquity of these symbols: “These old Mystery Teachers first divided the heavens into two parts, the North and the South, which they symbolized by two poles or pillars. . . . These were called the two Sustainers of Heaven: also they represented the two gods of the Pole Stars, and later, in Egyptian, were named the two Tatt Pillars. These two pillars were always placed at the porchway entrance of every Temple in the world, and represent Jachin and Boaz in our Masonic Temple.”†

*Frank G. Higgins, “The Beginning of Masonry,” p. 63.

†Dr. Albert Churchward, “Arcane of Freemasonry, p. 171.

THE MASONIC COLUMNS.

The above quotations prove the hoary antiquity of the prototypes of our two columns, and we proceed to the more strictly masonic line.

Whether King Solomon's Temple ever existed on the physical plane is a moot question in no wise influencing the fact that every Masonic Lodge is modelled on that famous building. As there is little literature outside of the Biblical narrative and Josephus giving accounts of the temple, we have to draw from those sources chiefly. We quote again from *Morals and Dogma*: "You enter the lodge between two columns. They represent the two which stood in the porch of the Temple on each side of the great eastern gateway. The pillars of bronze, four fingers breadth in thickness, were, according to the most authentic account,

—that in the First and that in the Second Book of Kings, confirmed in Jeremiah,—eighteen cubits high, with a capital five cubits high. The shaft of each was four cubits in diameter. A cubit is one foot and 707-1000. That is, the shaft of each was a little over thirty feet eight inches in height, the capital of each eight feet six inches in height, and the diameter of the shaft six feet ten inches. The capitals were enriched by pomegranates of bronze, covered by bronze net work, and ornamented with wreaths of bronze, and appear to have imitated the shape of the seed-vessel of the lotus or Egyptian lily, a sacred symbol to the Hindus and Egyptians. The pillar or column on the right, or in the south, was named Jachin, and that on the left Boaz. Our translators say that the first word means “He shall establish,” and the second “In it is strength.”

“The columns were imitations by Khurum, the Tyrian artist, of the great columns consecrated to the Winds and Fire, at the entrance to the famous Temple of Malkarth, in the city of Tyre. It is customary, in

Lodges of the York Rite, to see a celestial globe on one, and a terrestrial one on the other, but these are not warranted if the object be to imitate the original two columns of the Temple." In another place the same writer says: "On one column Masonry sets the celestial globe, symbol of the spiritual part of our composite nature, and on the other the terrestrial globe, symbol of the material part. In explanation of the symbology we find when Solomon erected these pillars, it is supposed he had in view the two pillars which guided the Israelites in the wilderness—the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. It certainly cannot have been for mere ornament that Solomon had them erected; it was to represent and memorialize the repeated promises of God of support to His people. . . . The solstices, Cancer and Capricorn, the two gates of Heaven, are the two Pillars of Hercules, beyond which he, the sun, never journeyed, and they still appear in our lodges as the two great columns, Jachin and Boaz, and also as the two parallel lines that bound the circle with a point in the center,

emblem of the Sun between the two tropics of Cancer and Capricorn."*

The Globes and the Lotus.

With reference to the terrestrial and celestial globes mentioned above, it is only in modern Masonry that these have been placed on the capitals of the columns. Some noted masons believe this to be an error arising from the misinterpretation of the words in the ritual "pomel or globe." "Pomel" signifies a spherical body, and in the Biblical and Egyptian description of the pillars alluded to the chapiters placed on the columns representing the lotus (wrongly called lily), whose globular flower symbolizes the universe. Even if the placing of the celestial and terrestrial globes on our columns is historically incorrect, the idea underlying their use is identical with the original symbol, viz.: the suggestion of the universality of the Order and the claims of Brotherhood. Mr. Frank Higgins hints at another interpretation;† "The globe tops of the pillars represent indifferently

*Albert Pike "Morals and Dogma," p. 9.

†Frank G. Higgins, "The Beginning of Masonry," p. 65.

“heaven and earth,” or “the sun and Moon,” through an esoteric or hidden meaning which has accompanied them from their original home in northern India.”

Pillars in European Cathedrals.

An interesting example of these pillars in modern Europe is given by Stieglitz and quoted in Oliver and Macoy's General History and Cyclopædia of Freemasonry: “The pillars are now standing in the cathedral of Wurzburg, one of the oldest cities of Germany, and formerly capital of Franconia. He dates them from the time of the construction of the cathedral in 1042 by the Fraternity of Steinmetzen, the peculiar form and ornamentation of the capitals and bases being characteristic of the architecture of that period. They were originally situated, like the brazen columns of Solomon's Temple, on either side of the porch, Jachin on the right, Boaz on the left; but at the present time they are placed in an inverse position within the body of the cathedral not far from the main entrance, on either side of a Gothic doorway

leading to a small vaulted chamber. He says that 'they were intended to bear a symbolic reference to the Fraternity, which reference is revealed to the initiated in their peculiar proportions, in the ingenious construction and combination of the shafts and capitals, as well as by the names sculptured on the abacus'."

With reference to these two particular pillars, the well-known French Masonic writer, F. Oswald Wirth,* gives the further illuminating remarks: "When seeking to interpret the symbolism of the two columns Jachin and Boaz of the cathedral of Wurzburg, we thought we could relate the first to the Doric system, and the second to the Ionic, while reserving to ourselves later the elucidation of the two Initiations, one of which is commonly called Masculine and the other Feminine. . . .

In Masonry, the degree of Apprentice, with its purification and its dramatic tests, corresponds to the Doric initiation. The column Jachin, which

*See his article, "The Two Initiations," in the monthly Masonic organ, "Le Symbolisme," for February, 1913.

is masculine—active, ought then to belong to that of the first degree. As to color, it is red (fire), which best suits it; in which case the column Boaz may be white (purity), or white and blue (air), for it is feminine, passive or receptive. As for the degree of Fellow-Craft, it would be inaccurate to think of it as purely Ionic; it leads to the Ionic initiation, superposing the latter upon the Doric.”

It is worthy of note that in the White Tower within the ancient Tower of London, there are two columns on the capitals of which are glyphs signifying Jachin and Boaz,* and we are told on good authority that the two towers on Gothic Cathedrals, as also the steeples on churches are perpetuations of these two columns.

Historic and Symbolic Aspects.

Although these two pillars are to be found in all Masonic rites, are depicted on the earliest tracing-boards, and are alluded to in the catechisms before the middle of the 18th century, yet “they appear to have been

*Hargrave Jennings, “The Rosicrucians, Their Rites and Mysteries.”

introduced into the lectures rather as parts of an historical detail, than as significant symbols—an idea which seems gradually to have grown up. The catechism of 1731 describes their name, their size, and their material, but says nothing of their symbolical import.”* It appears that William Hutchinson (1732-1814) was the first to introduce the symbolical idea of the pillars into the Masonic system.

The same Encyclopædia sums up the subject as follows: “Without going into minute details, the Masonic symbology of the two pillars may be considered as twofold. First in reference to the names of the pillars, they are symbols . . . of the strength and stability of the Institution; and then in reference to the ancient pillars of fire, and cloud, they are symbolic of our dependence on the superintending guidance of the Grand Architect of the Universe, by which alone that strength and stability are secured.”

Occult Significance of Columns.

This author does not go into the occult significance of the columns, so we turn to another, who sees deeper:

*Mackey's Encyclopædia, p. 586.

"These columns were made round because they represented the infinity to which there is no corner. They represented equally the spirality of evolution, the one encompassed in the other. They were made hollow to denote or symbolize the concrete exterior of the physical, and the finer, ethereal, spiritual essence of man. Boaz represented the strength which enabled nature to continue indefinitely.

"Existence is continued and operated by the motion and pressure of light, and the spiritual essences must be protected by an outer something which will leave it to work in darkness alone.

"The Motion of Motion is life itself, and must of necessity be by itself. It was so in the columns. The moment a disfiguring scar or scratch was made on the outside of the columns it affected the interior to just such a degree, weakening the resistance. It is to this end that Masons are instructed to remain at peace with each other.

"Albert Pike says that in the hollows of the pillars the E. A. stored

his working tools. This may or may not be so, but one thing is certain, and that is that the hollow interiors represented the conservation of spiritual energy."

Spiritual Aspects Personified.

Again, the spiritual significance of the columns is expressed in an assembled Lodge by the masons seated in the North and South being termed "the Columns," because each individual mason aids in supporting the spiritual Temple. If the import of this symbolical term were better realized, perhaps we should find more masons rise to the responsibility indicated thereby.

The Broken Column.

The use of the BROKEN COLUMN in Masonry is of Hebrew derivation. That astute people, we read in the Bible, metaphorically described their princes and nobles as "pillars of the State," and if they perished, the columns were broken. The adoption of the Broken Column in Masonry is as the "emblem of the fall of one of the chief supporters of the Craft."

Envoi.

The foregoing is offered as setting forth the ideas of some of our foremost masons on the symbolism of the Pillars and Columns, and is not intended to be exhaustive. We have been told that every symbol is capable of seven interpretations, and these thoughts from other minds should stimulate students to seek in the depths of their own being further elucidation upon these and other masonic symbols.



